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tune to be born (the sixties, when the decadence of the Romantic movement was almost consummated, and the new realistic school had not stormed in), may be, and perhaps is, artistically infelicitous judged by the canons of good taste. And yet—that inevitable phrase that comes to the lips when one discusses Russian painting . . . Makovsky in his large canvases, his early Russian scenes, his religious processions and fairs, his “Russian Wedding,”² his “Monks,” his “Return of the Holy Carpet from

Note 2.—Called by the author himself “Gorko,” meaning “bitter.” The explanation lies in the Old Russian conception that the wine of the guests is bitter till the bridegroom kisses the bride.

Cairo” and others, shows a magnificence truly Russian by reason of the very barbarity of its blaze and prodigality of color. Of these pictures both the “Russian Wedding” and the “Monks” have been exhibited in the United States and Canada. Russian critics of the type of Benois, trained in the Western European School, while admitting Makovsky’s great talents, the rich and overpowering splendor of his artistic imagination—a splendor enhanced by this painter’s predilections for subjects drawn from Old Russian life with its gorgeousness of costume and barbaric love of ornamentation, incline rather to depreciation: but I believe that Makovsky’s rich and glowing canvases will stand the test of time.

Francis Hoffine Snow

To be continued

THE AMERICAN PLAYGOER AND THE AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT

By PROFESSOR BRANDER MATTHEWS, Columbia University

OF all the theorists of the theater in the nineteenth century no one had a broader or a deeper insight into the conditions under which every playwright has to do his work than Francisque Sarcey; and it is to him that we owe the clearest statement of the fact that the most important of these conditions are the playgoers for whom the dramatist destines his play. Sarcey went so far as to declare that all the principles of playmaking could be deduced from a study of the spectators, of their desires (conscious and unconscious), of their needs, of their opinions and of their prejudices. As the playwright has to interest, to hold and to move the playgoers, he must discover the means whereby they may be moved and interested.

The drama differs from every other form of literature (except oratory) in that it is intended, not for the solitary reader in the library, not for man as an individual, but for spectators assembled in the theater, for men in the mass; and all the problems of playmaking, all the technical difficulties of exposition, contrast, construction, climax and solution, are due to the necessity of taking thought about the crowd before whom the play is to be performed and by whom it is to be judged without possibility of appeal.

While it is Sarcey who first amply expounded this doctrine, it had been uttered more or less incompletely by many of his predecessors in criticism. Wordsworth, for example, had asserted that “the poet writes under one restriction only, namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure.” More than a century earlier, in his first examination of the rules which were then believed to govern dramatic art, Corneille had admitted that “the sole aim of dramatic poetry is to please the spectators.” Nor did it take great courage for the French dramatist to make this admission, even after the controversy over the “Cid,” since he was but echoing Castelvetro. And this Italian critic, in his turn, believed that he was only interpreting the opinion of Aristotle.

In his illuminating study of “Modern French Criticism,” Professor Irving Babbitt called attention to Rousseau’s shrewd remark (in his famous “Letter to D’Alembert”) that the dramatist is not free to choose his problem but has it imposed upon him by the taste of his country and of his time; an audience in Messina enjoying a tale of vengeance and an audience in Tunis sympathizing with a story of piracy. Rousseau, following Saint-Evremond, went so far as to suggest that the “*Cedipus the King*” of Sophokles did not originally succeed because of its absolute human appeal but because it expressed the taste of an Athenian audience of the fifth century B. C. Here both of the Frenchmen overstate or misstate their case. “*Cedipus*” succeeded originally because its absolute human appeal was in accord with the taste of the Athenian audience. And Professor Babbitt is himself misleading in his comment that “Saint-Evremond and Rousseau would seem to have been convicted of error by recent successful revivals of ‘*Cedipus*’ as an acting play.”

At its first performance “*Cedipus*” was immediately popular with the citizens of Athens, whereas no one of the recent revivals can fairly be called popular; those in Greek were both academic and sporadic, and that in French owed its temporary vogue to the superb acting of Mounet-Sully, which attracted audiences not at all in sympathy with the remote and abhorrent theme of the Attic tragedy.

That Saint-Evremond and Rousseau had laid hold of a sound theory is likely to be disputed by no one who is familiar with Le Bon’s stimulating study of the “Psychology of the Crowd” or who has followed the subsequent discussion of the mental and moral characteristics of a theatrical audience, undertaken by Mr. William Archer, Mr. A. B. Walkley and Mr. Clayton Hamilton. In the course of this protracted debate attention has been called to more than one point which the merely literary critics of the drama are likely to overlook. In the first place few or no themes are really universal and perennial; and plots which delighted the ancient Greeks may find the

modern French unresponsive, just as situations which stirred to swift enthusiasm Spanish playgoers in the seventeenth century may prove unmoving and even repellent to British and American spectators in the twentieth.

In the second place, even when the topic which the playwright proposes to treat is one apt to be acceptable to the theatergoer of his own race and of his own epoch, he has always to remember that he is appealing, not to the individual spectators singly, but to the audience as a whole, as a crowd of a special sort, with a collective soul of its own quite different from the mere sum total of its constituent elements.

The lyric and epic poets and the novelists can succeed, even if they please only a solitary reader here and there, now and then, so long as they can attract in the course of time a sufficient number of these solitary readers. But the playwright has to please immediately a consecutive series of groups, composed of all sorts and conditions of men; he has to move them in a mass; he has to make his impression instantly and unhesitatingly on his earliest audience and repeatedly thereafter before his subsequent audiences. He cannot wait for readers fit tho' few; his piece must attract at once and also again and again, or its author will suffer from "the deep damnation of its taking off."

The play's prosperity lies in the eyes of those who see it performed in the theater, first of all, even if its ultimate reputation depends also upon the confirmatory decision of the supreme court which may be convened later in the library. This higher tribunal often reverses the favorable verdict of the original jury; but never in the long history of the drama have the judges in the study been able to set aside an unfavorable verdict of the stage and to send the play back for retrial before a new jury.

All the greatest dramatic poets were in their own day merely successful playwrights; and all the masterpieces of the drama that we now analyze and annotate in the library were originally only plays popular in the theater, delighting the playgoer of the author's own day—a playgoer who never suspected that the pieces he applauded were to be acclaimed as masterpieces by later generations.

"*Œdipus*" and "*Hamlet*" and "*Tartuffe*," each in its own day and in its own city, rivaled the popularity that was to be won in other days and in other cities by the "*Two Orphans*," the "*Silver King*" and "*Shenandoah*."

It was primarily to attain this immediate approval of his compatriots and contemporaries that Sophokles and Shakspeare and Molière composed these masterpieces; and about any possible appreciation of their work by us here in America centuries later the Athenian and the Londoner and the Parisian thought little and cared not at all. When they had exprest themselves and when they had imprest their audiences—they had satisfactory accomplit what they had set out to do.

The lyric poet can express himself without reserve and without taking thought of his listeners; but the dramatic poet can express only that part of himself in which his spectators will be interested. If he ventures to express himself too completely, he is likely to find that these spectators will fail to follow him. This explains why it is that no great dramatic poet has ever been an original thinker, in the van of progress. This explains also the modi-

cum of truth in Théophile Gautier's complaint that the drama never dealt with a new idea until it had been worn threadbare in the newspaper and the novel. The novel can capture separate readers here and there, whereas the drama has to allure spectators in multitude; and therefore the playwright cannot treat a theme profitably until the multitude is ripe for its discussion. If Mr. Augustus Thomas had brought out the "*Witching Hour*" when he first conceived it, the broad public might not have been ready then to admit the possibility of the influence of unspoken thought on human action. Very wisely Mr. Thomas reserved his play until a knowledge of the subtler psychic phenomena had percolated down to the broad playgoing public. There is a tide in the affairs of playwrights which taken at the flood leads on to fortune; taken at the ebb it leads to failure.

It has been neatly remarkt that the orator gives back in a shower only what he receives as vapor from his hearers; and in a measure this is true also of the dramatist, who is likely to be able to put forth his amplest power only before audiences of the broadest sympathy. Noble as Greek tragedy is, it seems to us at times a little remote and more than a little chilly, perhaps because the Attic theater was open only to the citizens of Athens, thus excluding not only the women but also the slaves by whose labors the city-state was supported. In like manner the Elizabethan drama suffers from the voluntary abstention of the Puritans, since their presence in the playhouse would have tended to curb the vulgar ribaldry which gratified the riffraff of a seaport city and to correct the casual exhibition of moral callousness. More homogeneous and therefore perhaps more representative than this Athenian or this London audience, even if less cultivated than the one and less eagerly independent than the other, was the Parisian audience under Louis XIV, composed of courtiers, men of letters, women of wit, solid burghers, with a fairly adequate admixture of the artisans.

The French have been fortunate above other races in their constant support of the theater by the whole urban population, thereby preserving the representative character of the drama which has never been allowed in French to languish and to dwindle for half a century at a time as it has in the other modern literatures. It is true that there is an obvious exclusion from French audiences, that of young girls, who are carefully guarded by their mothers from the vivid exhibitions of passion with which the dramatist necessarily deals. The disadvantages of this exclusion are obvious enough to all students of the stage, especially in the past half-century. Yet it had its advantages also in that the French dramatists have felt themselves free to deal sincerely with topics as unfit for female immaturity as those which Hawthorne and Tolstoi handled austere in the "*Scarlet Letter*" and in "*Anna Karénina*."

Goethe, always a suggestive critic of the drama, held that this exclusion was highly desirable. "What business have our young girls at the theater?" he askt in one of his conversations with Eckermann. "They do not belong to it; they belong to the convent—the theater is only for men and women who know something of human affairs. When Molière wrote girls were in the convent and

he was not forced to think about them. But now we cannot get rid of these young girls, and pieces which are weak and therefore proper will continue to be produced."

It is nearly a century since the wise German spoke these pregnant words; and we may be sure that he would be greatly grieved to learn that in the final years of the nineteenth century women were at last admitted to the orchestra seats of the Théâtre Français, monopolized by men during the first two hundred years of its history. We cannot even guess how strong Goethe's language might be if he were permitted to see the almost exclusively feminine audience which is likely to fill a New York theater on a Saturday afternoon. Certainly the predominance of young girls would strike the great German as auguring ill for the development of a native drama dealing seriously with the pressing problems of American life.

Eckermann would surely have to record a reminder that in each of the three great dramatic epochs—in Greece when Æschylus, Sophokles and Euripides were almost contemporary, in England when Shakspeare followed Marlowe and preceded Beaumont and Fletcher, and in France when Corneille, Molière and Racine labored side by side—the audiences contained very few women, no young girls and an immense majority of men of mature years.

Never before in all the long history of dramatic literature has there been a time or a place where the proportion of women among the spectators was as large as it is to-day in the theaters of the English-speaking community or where the average playgoers were as youthful as they are here and now. It seems as if the future playwrights of the English language, both British and American, will have to work under the handicap of having to please first of all boys and girls rather than the grown men to whom the great dramatists of the past were permitted to appeal directly. And these playwrights have also to reckon with the fact that not only are the poor excluded but that even the fairly prosperous artisan class sends very few representatives to the more or less fashionable playhouses where new pieces are customarily produced. Those of us who have been hoping for, and even proclaiming, a revival of the drama in our literature ought to ask ourselves whether a truly representative drama for a democracy has any real chance of coming into being, when every play has to be adjusted to a theater wherein the spectators are largely feminine, mainly juvenile, and almost wholly well to do.

The youthfulness of the average American playgoer is due, of course, to the voluntary abstention of older men and women, who can be coaxed back into the playhouse occasionally only by the promise of a performance likely to reward their presence. With advancing years come multiplied engagements and social obligations, tightening family ties and domestic duties, accomplished by relaxing energy and accumulating inertia which lead us to prefer a placid evening by the fireside to a venturesome evening in front of the footlights. In my youth I was an undaunted and indomitable first-nighter, and I can recall one week before I was twenty-one when I went to the theater ten times. To-day in my declining years there are stretches of ten weeks when I may enter a theater only once. Yet altho' I am now only an intermittent playgoer, my interest in the drama is

as keen as ever, and I am likely to be lured sooner or later into seeing most of the performances which are really worth while.

Those who maintain that the immaturity of our latterday audiences is a menace to the rich development of our drama might support their belief by pointing out that two of the finest and firmest plays of Sir Arthur Pinero, "Midchannel" and the "Thunderbolt" failed to attain the full measure of the success they nobly deserved, in the same seasons when certain false and feebly immoral pieces (needless to name here) ran triumphant careers from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon. Yet this argument may be met by two answers. First of all, there never has been an epoch when the drama was abundantly flourishing in any modern literature, nor when a goodly number of the overwhelmingly popular plays of the period might not be dismissed as lacking in permanent merit, owing their contemporary vogue to the fleeting appeal of a captivating story or the transitory taste of the moment. It is well to remind ourselves that the violent situations and the flamboyant rhetoric of Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy" tickled the ears of the groundlings as satisfactorily as the massive action and the measured eloquence of Shakspeare's "Julius Cæsar," and that the spectacular artifices of the melodramatic "Toison d'Or" of Thomas Corneille drew more money into the coffers of the company than had been attracted by any of the loftier tragedies of Pierre, his elder brother.

In the second place, it needs to be noted that "Midchannel" and the "Thunderbolt" were not failures, even altho' they did not prove as attractive to American audiences as other pieces produced in the same seasons, more picturesque in situation and more saccharine in sentiment. It is consoling to know that no play, at once ambitious and vigorous, has failed in the United States in the past twenty-five years—except in a very few cases when a good play has been killed by bad acting. The theatergoers in our larger cities are open-minded and hospitable and they are eager to welcome the best plays of the time, even if they are not always capable of discerning which really are the best.

There is comfort for the future in the knowledge that the Sothorn-Marlowe presentations of Shakspeare were always marvellously remunerative, that Mrs. Fiske was continuously successful in "Leah Kleschna" and in "Mary of Magdala," in the "New York Idea," and in "Salvation Nell"; that Mr. Belasco pleased his public when he gave us the "Return of Peter Grimm," the "Phantom Lover," and the "Easiest Way"; that plays as different as the "College Widow" and the "Poor Little Rich Girl," the "Yellow Jacket" and the "Man Who Married a Dumb Wife" were each in its turn approved by the American theatergoer, even if in these same years the American theatergoer was also flocking to other places now already forgotten because they were unworthy of remembrance. It is a good augury for the coming American dramatist that the best plays of Bronson Howard and Clyde Fitch, of Mr. William Gillette and of Mr. Augustus Thomas have been the most profitable.

It is significant of the alacrity with which the American public accepts the presentation of American character that in the past thirty or forty years the playgoers of New York encouraged three experi-

ments in new forms, without any exact parallel in any other country—the shrewd transcripts of every-day life humorously displayed in the lively farce-comedies of Charles Hoyt—the increasingly veracious studies of the vividly contrasting types of immigrants in the tenement-house district, beginning with the crude song and dance of the “Mulligan Guards” and culminating in “Squatter Sovereignty,” the masterpiece of Edward Harrigan—and finally the chaotic conglomerates of the joyously irrepressible Weber and Fields.

Over against these things which stand to the credit of our American theater must be placed the regret that as yet no American playwright has come forward with a drama as weighty as Pinero’s “Thunderbolt” or as Paul Hervieu’s “Trail of the Torch.” It may be that an American dramatist, richly enough endowed to rival these masterpieces, is already at work and that we may be gratified at any moment by an invitation to sit in judgment on what he has wrought. This richly endowed dramatist, veteran or novice, will have to reckon with the customary audience of the American theater, disproportionately youthful and disproportionately feminine. He will have to face the fact that an audience predominately youthful is certain to be more interested in plot than in character, to be ro-

manticist and optimistic, to be ignorant of the bitter experiences of life and to be unwilling to gaze at them, to be enthusiastic and eager and in a hurry. He will need to recognize that an audience predominately feminine is certain to be more interested in the quantity of emotion than in its quality, to lack relish for the robust forms of humor, to prefer sentimentality to sentiment, to resent the telling of the truth, even if it is not the whole truth, and to be defective in that sense of justice which is not common even among men.

These characteristics of the two most important constituent elements of the American audience the American dramatist will have to take into account; and he will have to select his story, combine his plot, create his characters, project his vision of life, in a word, he will have to express himself amply if not completely, in spite of these handicaps which would seem to Goethe simply crushing. Probably, when all is said, they are not really heavier than those under which the dramatists of other countries have labored and over which they have triumphed. Yet no playwright can ever hope to achieve success by ignoring the opinions and prejudices and peculiarities of the spectators he has to please; he must grapple with these imponderables and conquer the good-will of the audience despite them.

Brander Matthews

THE ÆSTHETIC IDEAL

By FR. ROUSSEL-DESPIERRES

Continued from the October Number

CHAPTER II—THREE METHODS

THE ideal is at one and the same time sentiment and thought. Under these two aspects the ideal escapes from all dogmatic authority. In its essence it is an individual act of faith and one has a right to ask how philosophy could create a common ideal and impose it on men’s minds. Let the reader be reassured! there is no intention to impose a new dogma; philosophy, like thought itself, refuses all constraint; she has no other means than persuasion. Every man who affirms an ideal does the work of a philosopher. The vocation of philosophic writers is to facilitate the task of sincere minds who are struggling to reach certainty and to conceive a rational will; they propose to those who, suffering from doubt, lack the energy of seeking the truth, such doctrines as will soothe and sustain them.

A complete philosophy would include an acceptable explanation of the world and the First Cause, a definition of our destiny and the principles of morality. Such a philosophy will be made. We dare hope that it lies in the power of any man of good-will to erect a philosophy as solid as the most scientific constructions of thought. In order to bring us fairly to this enterprise there exist three methods, perhaps of unequal sureness, none of which, however, exceed the powers of an attentive and reflecting intelligence. These three methods conduct us to identical conclusions.

The first one, perhaps a bit mystical, has for its principle the exact conception that every man possesses concerning being, good and duty. To con-

ceive of a duty is to create it; to imagine an ideal is to will it. Will is nothing but a conception founded in conscience, one which imposes itself by a kind of internal evidence. By its own being it is a fact, a reality, just as the work of art springs from the brain and hands of the artist. The proof that it is real is, that it acts upon external reality to modify the same. The voluntary ideal thus demonstrates and justifies its own existence while affirming itself.

Creative will has no need of the support of a belief, since in itself it is an affirmation, a belief. It carries its own certitude in itself precisely because it is a fact, in reality. It ignores or dominates the dogmas which would strangle it. The reason for existence and its legitimacy derive from its nobility and from the thought which animates it. The right of the ideal has for its foundation its own superiority; never is the will more prolific than when it seems the most chimerical; for instance: if it is in revolt against the barbarism of a religious dogma or a scientific law, whether it be the eternal damnation of sinners or the implacable war for existence. In the revolt against divine horrors it raises up the human soul bowed down but not moralized by terror; by throwing itself between the combatants it pacifies the blood-thirsty instincts and moderates the violence of combat.

The ideal of every man by its very definition is the highest thing which he is able to conceive. The deep root of our conceptions and wills is no other, in fact, than desire, or rather perhaps love. I do not